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**PAPER TITLE: CREATIVE INDUSTRIES: VISIONARY PARTNERS
FORGING AN AFRICAN RENAISSANCE**

Creative Industries:

Visionary partners forging an African Renaissance

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According to a report by Standard Bank, the number individuals in Africa, those with at least 30 million USD in assets, are expected to increase by almost 60 % over the next 10 years. As a result, many of African wealthy individuals are adopting sophisticated investment strategies focusing on art and culture, and even philanthropy. Moving away from traditional European references, this generation has been looking at alternative models in the South.

China builds about 200 contemporary art museums and trained more than 100 youngsters in art related fields over the past 10 years. The booming economy also generated a new class of billionaires who has been investing in fine art and cultural institutions. As a direct consequence, Western art markets have been speculating on contemporary Chinese art, making prices increase by 1 000 % since 2007. China has become one of the most dynamic art market scenes, thus questioning the USA's traditional monopoly.

The United Arab Emirates has been going under major transformations, including art and culture in their business and development plans. In 2004, the Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority transformed Saadiyat Island into a 7 districts hub for housing, leisure, sports, business and culture.

"The aim of Saadiyat Island must be to create a cultural asset for the world, a gateway and beacon for cultural experience and exchange. Culture crosses all boundaries and therefore Saadiyat will belong to the people of the UAE, the greater Middle East and the world at large. An entire district on Saadiyat Island is devoted to culture and the arts. Unprecedented in scale and scope, Saadiyat Cultural District will be a live canvas for global culture, drawing local, regional and international visitors with unique exhibitions, permanent collections, productions and performances. Its iconic institutions will be housed in buildings drawing a statement of the finest architecture at the beginning of the 21st century."

Beyond Abu Dhabi, Dubai has an international contemporary art fair and Sharjah hosts a contemporary art biennial and foundation. And Qatar is also investing in culture after a global investment strategy in sports. Even if these models are states initiatives, the partnerships involved wealthy local individuals and companies determined to put their country on the international map of key financial and cultural players.

For China, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, art is a diplomatic tool, an economic booster and a vehicle for social cohesion. It is a well thought strategy to enter new markets as well as to polish their image on the international scene.

A new generation of African business related individuals is in the same state of mind. Unlike their elders, they are not passively watching the world evolve before their eyes. They want to decide what is best for their country and people rather than to be told what to do, and how to do it. They are active protagonists with a double agenda:

1] To put their country at the table of the worldwide decision-making group.
Art and culture are their weapons to promote the cultural diversity of their country and attract foreign investors. They are aware that art and culture are an added value asset, a diplomatic tool, and a smart argument to be heard, understood, appreciated

and respected. Art and culture are their gateway to join the global economy power game.

2] To have a local impact, to give back to their community and make a difference. How to leave a legacy that matters? If it was just about ego or a sense of moral obligation vis-à-vis their community, they would have probably build a hospital or created a fund for education.

Hailing from Egypt, Morocco, Benin, Nigeria, Angola or South Africa, these individuals and banks would be called patrons in the West, but I will call them visionaries and activists.

- Visionaries, as they are amongst the still very few that deeply believe that art and culture are clear vehicles for change in society. They know that artists are not just entertainers always begging for funding. They know that art is about education, capacity building, civic duties, and citizenship. They know that artists are probing social, political, economic, spiritual and cultural issues, that they rely on History to challenge the present in order to project an inspiring future. Their work and projects are designed as knowledge sharing platform for African audiences. Artists as agents for change and barometers of society are on the radar of Africans business related individuals determined to make a difference in action.

- Activists, as they know that contemporary creativity is the legacy for generations to come. Investing in it means preserving this heritage. They do not want contemporary art to have the same destiny as African masks: ex-filtrated and stored in Western museums. They do not want their grandchildren to beg for a visa and travel abroad to know and understand who they are, where they come from and what their culture is about. They do not want foreign scholars to tell their children and grandchildren what it means to be African and how culture plays a decisive role in their lives. These individuals want to partner with African artists and scholars so that African art and culture is studied, analyzed and told by Africans locally and internationally.

African activists and more committed visionaries, this is what the African continent needs right now: decision makers and political leaders who see artists as their allies, as ambassadors, and as advocates for more equal justice, social change and economic growth. Then we could all proudly state that there is a Renaissance in Africa.

The Italian Renaissance was possible thanks to an economic growth and the involvement of the Medici family. For African Renaissance to go beyond spectacular slogans and rhetoric, our leaders will have to understand that strategic investments in the arts is mandatory not just for smart international communication, but also for a sustained local cultural, social and economic impact.

While the business of contemporary African art has increased by more than 200% the past decade, the vast majority of these transactions did not happen on the continent, benefiting more individual African artists than the local economies. African art markets have been created by and are still largely rooted in the West. Discourses, theories, publications and major art exhibitions are hosted in Western universities and institutions. And continent-wise, do we have serious studies and reliable statistics about the socio-economic impacts of the Dakar biennial of contemporary African art, the Fespaco Pan-African film festival in Ouagadougou or local private initiatives? In the early 1990s, on the scale of the continent, there was only one independent art center based in Douala. Since the turn of the millennium, there has been a boom of private cultural organizations, young Africans holding a PhD in art history, studying cultural policies as well as curatorial and museum practices. But all

these great transformations have been possible without the involvement of African governments. Western public institutions and private foundations are the ones providing almost all the funding and scholarship.

In this context, can Africa possibly celebrate a Renaissance, as well as the great role of art and culture in socio-economic development, with non-Africans designing the financial mechanisms outside the continent? If independent African art organizations and cultural entrepreneurs have been shifting the paradigm the past decade, testing challenging models and implementing inspiring action plans, they need African governments and patrons to see the seeds they planted blossom and strongly impact African societies. The relevance of creative industries in the development process could remain a myth if African countries do not lay down the social and economic conditions to transform the Renaissance of Africa into an un-doubtful bright reality.

But can African political leaders and decision makers all listen, see, and acknowledge that African artists and organizations are serious partners for development? Will they one day, just like some new business related African individuals, behave like activists for the people by making a relevant long-term commitment and taking a strategic stand for art and culture? Will they have the political will and vision to involve African artists, art professionals and business companies in the decision-making as well as in the implementation process? The challenge for African governments is to keep in mind the bigger picture that only a few can see today: making art and culture a priority sector and a pivotal component of the African development agenda.

Before a Renaissance, Africa might need a collective continental Cultural Revolution: a radical change in state of mind, attitude and strategy. African Renaissance cannot and will not rise and shine without a complicit partnership between African governments, business related individuals and companies, creative thinkers and art communities across the continent.

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